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Editorial: Transgender transgression

Kokomo Tribune Editorial Board

It took three messages sent over the course of 13 minutes from President Donald Trump's Twitter account July 26 to trash years of careful progress on a sensitive issue.

"After consultation with my Generals and military experts, please be advised that the United States Government will not accept or allow... Transgender individuals to serve in any capacity in the U.S. Military. Our military must be focused on decisive and overwhelming ...victory and cannot be burdened with the tremendous medical costs and disruption that transgender in the military would entail. Thank you," he wrote.

This was a completely shocking about-face of the last year's lifting of such a ban, all through social media. With Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis on vacation for the week and no "Generals and military experts" having actually been consulted, the Pentagon was thrown into disarray. The White House referred further questions to the Department of Defense. DoD referred questions to The White House.

The pushback was swift, and came from unlikely quarters. Republican Senators John McCain, Joni Ernst, Richard Shelby and Orrin Hatch all attacked Trump's sudden reversal. As details began to trickle out about the origin of the statement, it became clear it wasn't even what members of Congress who had pressed the president had pushed for.

"House Republicans were planning to pass a spending bill stacked with his campaign promises, including money to build his border wall with Mexico," reported Politico's Rachael Bad and Josh Dawsey. "But an internal House Republican fight over transgender troops was threatening to blow up the bill. And House GOP insiders feared they might not have the votes to pass the legislation because defense hawks wanted a ban on Pentagon-funded sex reassignment operations — something GOP leaders wouldn't give them. They turned to Trump, who didn't hesitate. In the flash of a tweet, he announced that transgender troops would be banned altogether."

Even if the costs were the issue here, and not Trump's flippant change, the numbers don't add up. According to a DoD-funded Rand Corporation report, the medical costs for transitioning service members average between \$2.4 million and \$8.4 million annually. Meanwhile, the military shells out \$41.6 million for Viagra every year.

The military is the single largest employer of transgender Americans, and Trump's plan makes a mockery of these brave citizens' sacrifice.

“According to a 2015 UCLA study, nearly 150,000 transgender people have served in the military, or about 21 percent of all transgender adults in the U.S. By comparison, 10 percent of the general population has served,” reported The Los Angeles Times’ Alan Zerembo on Sept. 4, 2015.

For now, no changes have been implemented. Tuesday, Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Paul Zukunft told the Center for Strategic and International Studies he will “not break faith” with transgender service members. We hope this is as far as Trump’s ill-conceived plan goes, but if it continues, it would be nice if more than 140 characters of thought were put into it before it was unleashed.